

# International Conference on The Scale, Legacy, Documentation, and Adjudication of Crimes Committed in Kosovo

## Report 2025



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## International Conference on The Scale, Legacy, Documentation, and Adjudication of Crimes Committed in Kosovo

**Dates:** February 17-19, 2025

**Location:** "Ali Hadri" Institute of History, Pristina, Kosovo

**Organized by:** Institute of Crimes Committed During the War in Kosovo (ICCW)

### Executive Summary

The International Conference on the Scale, Legacy, Documentation, and Adjudication of Crimes Committed in Kosovo brought together scholars, legal experts, policymakers, and practitioners to address the multifaceted challenges of documenting, investigating, and adjudicating crimes committed during the Kosovo War (1998-1999). Held symbolically on Kosovo's Independence Day and the following days, the conference explored critical themes, including the destruction of cultural heritage, gender-based violence, mass grave mapping, and the role of state documents in proving intent.

## Key Takeaways



The conference also served as a platform to present findings from an upcoming volume co-edited by Dr. Aidan Hehir and Dr. Furtuna Sheremeti, which will contribute significantly to global transitional justice scholarship.

### Introduction

#### Background and Relevance

The conference addressed the enduring legacy of the Kosovo War, focusing on the documentation and adjudication of crimes committed during the conflict. Bringing together experts from diverse fields, such as law, anthropology, history, and sociology, fostered interdisciplinary dialogue and advanced research on transitional justice in Kosovo. The conference's symbolic timing on Kosovo's Independence Day (February 17) highlighted the connection between Kosovo's independence and the historical injustices it endured.

#### Objectives

The conference aimed to provide a comprehensive analysis of war crimes committed during the Kosovo War, focusing on both their scale and nature. It sought to explore innovative

methodologies for documenting and investigating these crimes while examining the role of cultural heritage and collective memory in post-war societies.

Additionally, the conference aimed to identify research gaps and propose future directions for transitional justice in Kosovo. A key outcome of the event was the development of an edited volume, designed to serve as a valuable resource for academics and policymakers.

Furthermore, the discussions emphasized the educational significance of war crimes documentation, the importance of preserving collective narratives, and the role of documentation as a model for other countries facing similar challenges.

### **Institutional Participation and Attendance**

The conference united diverse institutions, reflecting a strong commitment to war crimes documentation and transitional justice. Participants included government bodies, such as the Office of the Prime Minister, the Kosovo Police War Crimes Investigation Directorate, the Institute of Forensic Medicine, the Kosovo Archives, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora,

Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports.

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## **Government Bodies**

- Office of the Prime Minister
- Kosovo Police War Crimes Investigation Directorate
- Institute of Forensic Medicine
- Kosovo Archives
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports

## **Academic Institutions**

- “Ali Hadri” Institute of History
- Bournemouth University
- Charles University
- Dublin City University
- Institute of War Crimes in Kosovo (ICCW)
- Kosovo Academy of Sciences and Art
- New Europe College
- New York University
- Peace Research Institute Oslo
- RIT Kosovo
- University of Amsterdam
- University of Prishtina

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Prominent academic institutions, including the University of Prishtina, the "Ali Hadri" Institute of History, the Kosovo Academy of Sciences and Arts, the Institute of Crimes Committed During the War in Kosovo (ICCW), the University of Amsterdam, New York University, and New Europe College, were also represented.

The event also saw engagement from international organizations, such as EULEX, UNDP, UN DCO, the UK Embassy, and the Netherlands Embassy, alongside civil society organizations, including the Humanitarian Law Center Kosovo, Cultural Heritage Without Borders, Kosovo Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims, Alliance of Regional Historians, Kosovo Women's Fund for Human Rights, Fund for Humanitarian Law Kosovo, the Kosovo Agency of Statistics, National Library of Kosovo, Medica Gjakova, and Octopus.

Media outlets, including RTK, KTV, ATV, and RT21, extensively covered the event, ensuring wide-reaching coverage across various platforms. ICCW provided live-streaming on Facebook during the first and second days, along with posting live notes and quotes from the conference on LinkedIn.

With more than 200 attendees present each day, the three-day conference fostered meaningful dialogue and collaboration across multiple sectors, reinforcing the importance of interdisciplinary and institutional cooperation in addressing war crimes and their legacy.

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## International Organizations

- EULEX
- UNDP
- UN DCO
- UK Embassy
- Netherlands Embassy

## Civil Society Organizations:

- Humanitarian Law Center Kosovo
- Cultural Heritage Without Borders
- Kosovo Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims
- Alliance of Regional Historians
- Kosovo Women's Fund for Human Rights
- Fund for Humanitarian Law Kosovo
- Kosovo Agency of Statistics
- National Library of Kosovo
- Medica Gjakova
- Octopus

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## Media Coverage

- RTK
- KTV
- ATV
- RT21

### Academic Representation

The conference featured a strong academic presence, bringing together scholars from various prestigious institutions to contribute their expertise on war crimes documentation and transitional justice. This section highlights the diverse academic participation that enriched the discussions and provided valuable interdisciplinary insights.

Renowned universities and research institutes participated, including:

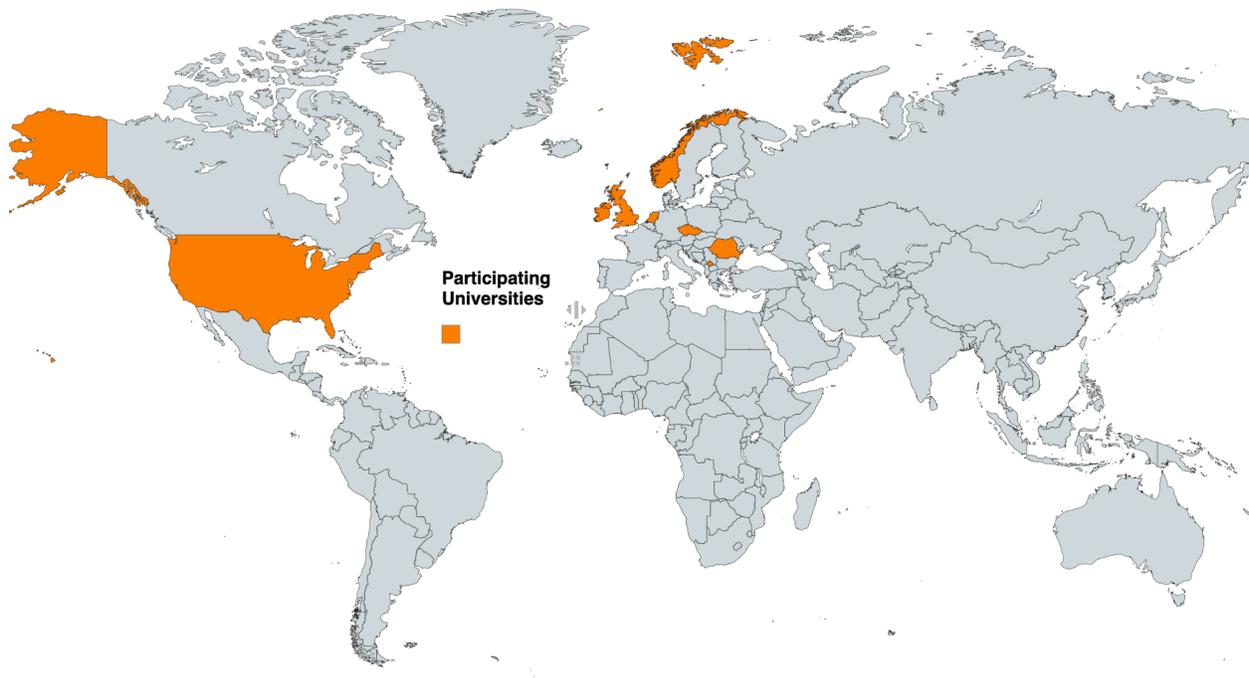
- University of Amsterdam
- Dublin City University
- New York University
- Bournemouth University
- Charles University
- Peace Research Institute Oslo
- New Europe College
- University of Prishtina
- RIT Kosovo
- Kosovo Academy of Sciences and Arts

In addition to the presenters, distinguished panelists engaged in in-depth discussions, offering expert perspectives on key topics such as cultural heritage destruction, legal challenges in war crimes adjudication, and gender-sensitive approaches to documentation.

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## Research Institutes

- University of Amsterdam
- Dublin City University
- New York University
- Bournemouth University
- Charles University
- Peace Research Institute Oslo
- New Europe College
- University of Prishtina
- RIT Kosovo
- Kosovo Academy of Sciences and Arts



## Methodology

This report is based on data gathered through:

- Attend keynote speeches, panel discussions, and parallel sessions across the three-day conference
- Documentation of direct quotes and insights from presenters and attendees
- Analysis of panel themes and discussions

The conference was structured into three main thematic sessions:

1. Crimes Committed During the War in Kosovo
2. Documenting and Investigating Crimes Committed During the War in Kosovo
3. Addressing Crimes Committed During the War in Kosovo

Each session included academic presentations followed by panel discussions with experts from various fields, creating a comprehensive and multi-perspective approach to the topics.

### Day I: Opening Session and Setting the Context

The conference commenced with opening remarks from key figures who established the importance of war crimes documentation for Kosovo's statehood, justice processes, and historical memory:



*Dr. Atdhe Hetemi* (Executive Director of ICCW) emphasized the critical role of war crimes documentation in strengthening Kosovo's statehood and international recognition. He highlighted ICCW's achievements, including the establishment of a comprehensive war crimes archive with materials from over 160 sources across Kosovo and the region.

*Prime Minister Albin Kurti* stressed the importance of truth-seeking, documentation, and justice for victims of war crimes, praising ICCW's efforts in preserving historical facts and pursuing justice.

*Prof. Dr. Arben Hajrullahu* (Rector of the University of Prishtina) highlighted academia's essential role in documenting war crimes and preserving historical truth, noting the University's partnership with ICCW to strengthen documentation efforts.

*Dr. Aidan Hehir and Dr. Furtuna Sheremeti* discussed the significance of documenting war crimes and addressing historical narratives, emphasizing the challenges of historical revisionism and the need for rigorous academic research in war crimes documentation.

*PhD c. Greta Avdyli* (Head of Academic Research Division, ICCW), presented the conference agenda and thematic structure, emphasizing the critical role of interdisciplinary collaboration in addressing war crimes.

## **Main Findings**

### **Thematic Sessions:**

The conference was organized around three key themes:

- **War Crimes Committed in Kosovo** – Analyzing the nature, scale, and impact of these crimes.
- **Documentation and Investigation of War Crimes** – Focusing on processes for establishing the truth and ensuring accountability.
- **Legal and Political Challenges in Addressing War Crimes** – Exploring frameworks for effective justice.



**Outcomes:**

The conference will culminate in an edited volume curated by Dr. Aidan Hehir and Dr. Furtuna Sheremeti, which will serve as an essential resource for academics and policymakers in the field of transitional justice.

## Day II: Crimes Committed During the War in Kosovo



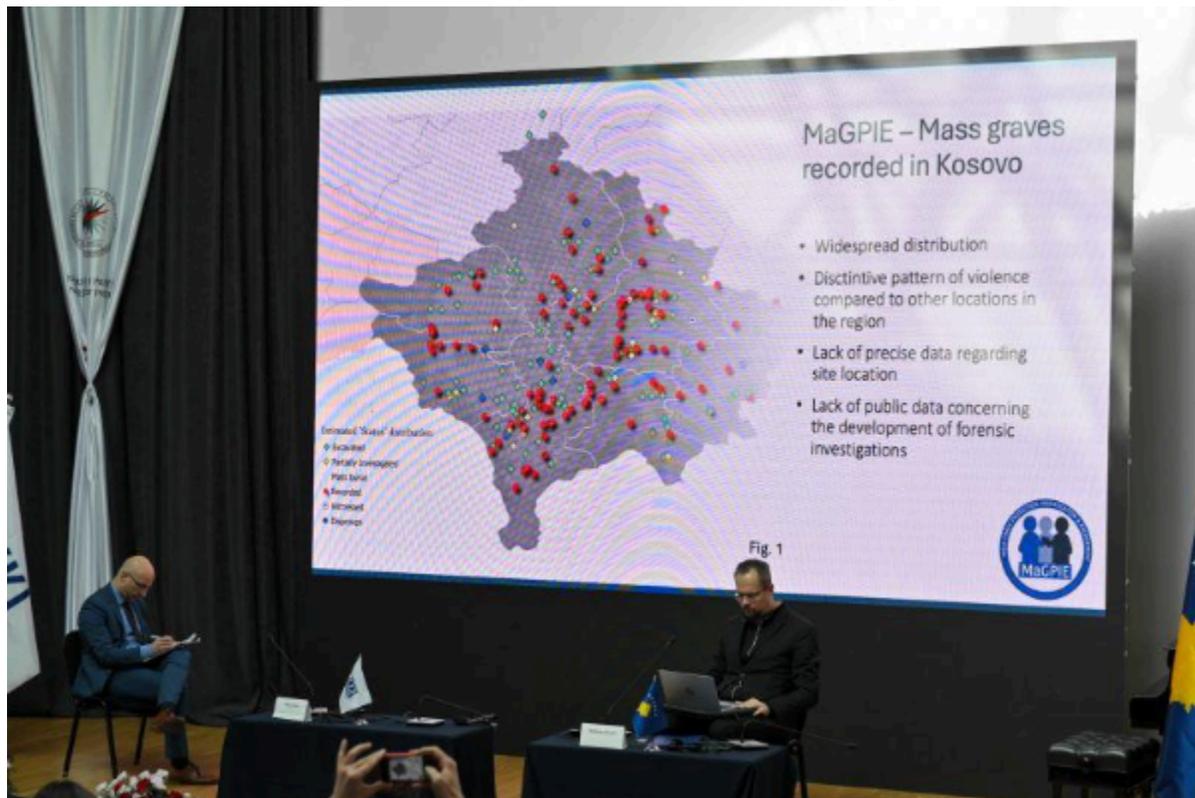
The second day of the conference began with Session 1, moderated by Greta Avdyli (Head of Academic Research Division, ICCW). The session delved into the destruction of cultural heritage, the suppression of Albanian identity during the conflict, and the complexities of proving intent within international legal frameworks.

### **Cultural Heritage and Identity Erasure**

*Chandler Williams* (Peace Research Institute Oslo) participated with his research "Even the Books: Destruction of Kosovar Libraries," illustrating how libraries, as repositories of history and cultural identity, were deliberately targeted to erase Albanian intellectual presence. Williams emphasized that "a library attack is a form of violence used to erase identity," highlighting the systematic nature of cultural suppression that began before the war with the removal of Albanian-language materials and the dismissal of ethnic Albanian librarians.

*Christian Costamagna* (New Europe College) participated with his research "Challenges in Demonstrating the Intent to Expel the Albanian Population from Kosovo through Yugoslav and Serbian State Documents (1998-1999)." Costamagna noted that limited access to key documents has hindered legal verification of a systematic expulsion plan, stating: "It is not even possible to believe that this [oppression] was done without a concrete plan." His research emphasized the need for alternative methods, such as satellite imagery, intelligence intercepts, and survivor testimonies, to reconstruct events when crucial documents have been destroyed or altered.

The second part of Session 1, moderated by Alban Dafa (Citizen Diplomacy Fellowship Fellow, ICCW), explored the nature of war crimes, the challenges involved in documenting these crimes, and the broader implications for justice and accountability in post-conflict societies.



### Legal Classification and Documentation of Crimes

*Mathias Holvoet* (University of Amsterdam) participated with his research, “An Inquiry Into the Nature of the Crimes Committed During the War in Kosovo. He argued that atrocities committed in Kosovo constitute crimes against humanity rather than conventional war crimes, emphasizing that precise legal classification is necessary to capture the systematic and targeted nature of the violence. As Holvoet noted, "Referring to them as war crimes implies that civilians were merely collateral damage when in reality, they were the intended victims."

*Rudinë Jakupi* (Dublin City University) participated with her research, "A Feminist Analysis of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence," highlighting how patriarchal narratives and stigma have marginalized survivors in legal and societal frameworks. Jakupi discussed particular challenges faced by male victims and those from rural areas, noting that "For a long time, acknowledging wartime sexual violence was seen as a threat to national identity, delaying justice for survivors."

*Diego Nunez and Melanie Klinkner* (Bournemouth University) participated in their research “Mass Grave Mapping: A Kosovar Case Study”. They showcased the MaGPIE project, an initiative mapping mass graves to support forensic investigations and ensure accountability for disappeared persons. They emphasized, "Accurate data collection is crucial to counteract the destruction of evidence and guarantee accountability."

“Accurate data collection is crucial to counteract the destruction of evidence and guarantee accountability.”

Following the sessions, **Panel Discussion 1**, moderated by Fehmi Mehmeti (Citizen Diplomacy Fellowship Fellow, ICCW), delved into the scale, legacy, documentation, and adjudication of war crimes, fostering an in-depth conversation on the challenges and methodologies involved in addressing these issues in Kosovo's post-conflict context.



The panel discussion featured perspectives from various experts:

*Arsim Bajrami* (Kosovo Academy of Sciences and Arts) emphasized that denial of genocide is a crime in itself and that Kosovo must take ownership in educating the world on the systematic nature of war crimes committed.

*Rozafa Berisha* (University of Prishtina & American University of Kosovo) shared research on how parents of missing persons navigate grief, with some transforming their homes into living memorials, highlighting the lack of institutional frameworks to properly acknowledge these losses.

*Sali Shoshi* (Cultural Heritage Without Borders Kosova) discussed the destruction of cultural heritage and noted that much of what is known about destroyed cultural sites is passed down through informal oral history, underscoring the need for institutionalized documentation.

### **Day III: Documenting and Addressing War Crimes**

The final day of the conference began with **Session 2**, moderated by Etnike Dibrani, which centered on the best methodologies and practices for documenting and investigating war crimes, emphasizing the importance of accurate and effective documentation in the pursuit of justice.



### Gender-Sensitive Approaches to Documentation

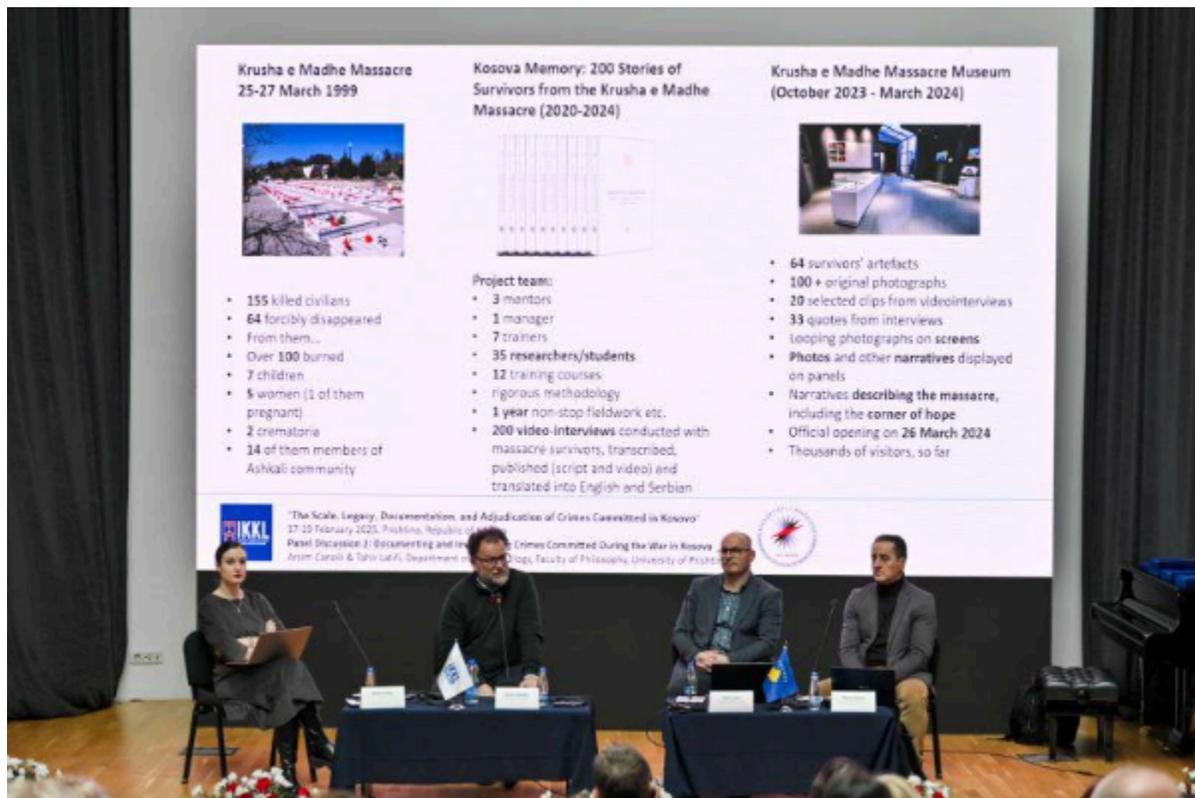
*Anna Di Lellio* (New York University) participated with her research, "Documenting War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity: A Gender-Attentive Strategy for Kosovo," advocating for a more comprehensive acknowledgment of survivors, particularly those affected by sexual violence. Di Lellio emphasized that "Survivors want recognition. They have had some recognition possible in these past 10 years, but it is what I call thin recognition. They want thick recognition," highlighting the distinction between surface-level acknowledgment and meaningful justice.

*Atdhe Hetemi and Rona Karahoda* (University of Prishtina & Charles University) addressed the fragmentation of documentation efforts and challenges in legal and methodological consistency in their presentation "Comprehensive Approaches to War Crimes Documentation." They noted that "We don't have the order or the description of the plan to get rid of Albanians, but by looking at patterns of destruction, we can see the organization and plan behind it," illustrating how patterns can reveal intent even in the absence of explicit documentation.

"We don't have the order or the description of the plan to get rid of Albanians, but by looking at patterns of destruction, we can see the organization and plan behind it."

Following Session 2, Panel Discussion 2, moderated by Greta Avdyli, explored the practical and ethical challenges associated with documenting and investigating war crimes, highlighting the complexities involved in ensuring both accuracy and integrity in the process.

### Documenting and Preserving Testimonies



The panel discussion on documenting crimes featured important insights on methodological and ethical considerations:

*Arsim Canolli* (University of Prishtina) stressed that documenting war crimes is never too late, as survivors retain vivid memories, and introduced the concept of "Framing but not Freezing," arguing that memory must be a continuous dialogue rather than a static record.

*Tahir Latifi* (University of Prishtina) discussed stigma and fear as barriers to collecting testimonies, noting that many survivors have passed away before sharing their stories. He highlighted the role of museums in preserving collective memory and honoring victims.

*Bekim Blakaj* (Humanitarian Law Center Kosovo) shared insights from HLC Kosovo's decades-long effort in war crimes documentation, including the collection of 20,000 testimonies. He emphasized that "Without accountability, there is no justice. Without justice, there is no lasting peace."

After the lunch break, Session 3, moderated by Vesa Sahatciu (Citizen Diplomacy Fellowship Fellow, ICCW), focused on the role of court archives and legal mechanisms in addressing war crimes, emphasizing the importance of proper documentation and the challenges of using legal frameworks to ensure justice.



### **Legal Archives and Justice Mechanisms**

*Nevenka Tromp* (University of Amsterdam) participated with her research “The Kosova War as Narrated in the Court Archives”. She analyzed discrepancies between legal narratives and survivors' testimonies in "The Kosovo War as Narrated in the Court Archives." Tromp emphasized that "Legal trials do more than serve justice—they shape history," highlighting the importance of legal archives in shaping historical understanding and challenging denialism.

**The final panel discussion**, moderated by Valentina Shahini-Grajcevci, focused on strategies for addressing the legacy of war crimes, emphasizing long-term restorative justice efforts and the importance of healing in post-conflict societies.



*Saranda Bogujevci* (Vice President of the Kosovo Assembly) emphasized the need for stronger judicial mechanisms within Kosovo and for holding Serbia accountable for crimes committed.

*Linda Gusia* (University of Prishtina) highlighted the importance of documentation in shaping historical narratives and called for structured research, educational initiatives, and intergenerational dialogue.

*Feride Rushiti* (Kosovo Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims) addressed the long-term impact of war crimes, particularly sexual violence, on survivors, emphasizing that justice goes beyond legal rulings to include recognition and rehabilitation.

### **Analysis & Discussion**

The conference emphasized the complexity of addressing war crimes and their legacy in Kosovo. Key issues discussed included:

- The challenge of documenting and preserving cultural heritage as part of post-war justice
- The intersection of legal, ethical, and methodological challenges in war crimes documentation
- The Crucial Role of Survivor Testimonies in Shaping Post-War Narratives

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The International Conference on the Scale, Legacy, Documentation, and Adjudication of Crimes Committed in Kosovo made significant contributions to the field of transitional justice by fostering interdisciplinary dialogue and showcasing innovative methodologies for documenting and addressing war crimes. The event highlighted the enduring importance of justice in post-war

societies, particularly through its emphasis on survivor-centered approaches and comprehensive documentation strategies.

The conference served as an important milestone in advancing transitional justice in Kosovo. It reinforced the necessity of comprehensive documentation, interdisciplinary research, and survivor-centered approaches to achieving justice for war crimes. To build on the conference's momentum, future efforts should focus on:

- Strengthening institutional frameworks for documentation and accountability
- Promoting interdisciplinary collaboration between legal, historical, and social science fields
- Continuing to elevate survivor voices and experiences in legal and public discourse

## Future Focus

1

Strengthening institutional frameworks for documentation and accountability

2

Promoting interdisciplinary collaboration between legal, historical, and social science fields

3

Continuing to elevate survivor voices and experiences in legal and public discourse

The event also set the stage for ongoing academic and institutional collaborations and established a roadmap for future research on transitional justice and war crimes in Kosovo and the wider region.

The conference's timing on Kosovo's Independence Day symbolically connected the pursuit of justice with national identity, underscoring how addressing historical injustices is integral to building a sustainable future. The forthcoming edited volume, co-edited by Dr. Aidan Hehir and Dr. Furtuna Sheremeti, promises to further advance scholarly understanding of transitional justice in Kosovo and contribute to global discourse on war crimes documentation.

By bringing together diverse perspectives from academia, government, and civil society, the conference created valuable opportunities for knowledge exchange and collaboration, strengthening Kosovo's capacity to address the legacies of conflict and work toward lasting peace.